Flying Snake

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British Big Cats . Mystery ball on Japanese coast . Giant Japanese frog . Ice Spikes . Monster butterfly . Ant mills . Alligator in New York . Snake with four eyes . Dog-Fox Hybrids . Thylacine . Bi - pedal fox . Giant salamanders .

FLYING SNAKE SUBSCRIPTION AND GUIDELINES

ESTABLISHED BY RICHARD MUIRHEAD AKA DR DEVO IN 2011

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Dr Devo`s Diary

"For I pray God for the introduction of new creatures into this island. For I pray God for the ostriches of Salisbury Plain, the beavers of the Medway and silver fish of Thames." Christopher Smart ` `Rejoice in the Lamb`.Poet,naturalist,lunatic (1722-1771)

Welcome to another veritable smorgasbord of cryptozoology and Fortean zoology. This is the first issue of Flying Snake at the new price of £5.99. As I may have said before for many years the cover price has been £3.99 and I nearly always paid the postage cost myself; however I have decided to increase the price now to cover postage costs within the United Kingdom. I hope however that you think this is acceptable because I think my magazine is unique particularly in its coverage of what I call archival material which I arbitrarily describe as being pre-1950 stories. It`s largely thanks to the British Newspaper Archive that I can include archival material so if you can afford a subscription or your local library has this facility I thoroughly recommend it. This issue of Flying Snake includes the third and final part of the Oxenham Bird Omen saga, followed by the regular contribution from Shane Lea and myself ,this time part one of mystery giant salamanders of the world, focusing on North America. Part two in issue # 27 of Flying Snake will cover mystery giant salamanders in Asia and Europe. Following this is a long essay on the thylacine in Australia by Michela de Mattei. Regular Flying Snake correspondent Richard George appears again, this time with a contribution on skunks seen in Britain. Regular section Notes and Queries continues with an eclectic collection of stories, including the mysterious giant ball that appeared on the Japanese coast, a bi-pedal fox, an axolotyl or axolotyl-type creature found in Washington state, U.S.A. , an alligator in New Zealand, exceptionally slow post and more. As usual we have Letters to Fate but it is sad to record that Gary Mangiacopra who regularly sent me these, passed away on November 14th 2022 of a heart attack. I will continue to feature Letters to Fate though.

The Oxenham Bird Omen Part Three

appearance, strange as it must have seemed to them; and we cannot be surprised if they were unable to deduce anything from the facts by way of explanation. Remembering that this was in the year 1743, it is perhaps the nearest approach to a contemporary scientific account of the circumstances that we could reasonably expect to find.

In the *Gentleman's Magazine* of the year 1794, part i. p. 94, the following paragraph occurs in the Obituary: "13th [January], at Exeter, aged 80, Mrs. Elizabeth Weston, relict of Stephen W., esq., eldest son of Stephen, some time bishop of Exeter. Mrs. E. Weston was the youngest daughter of William Oxenham, esq., of Oxenham. The last appearance of the bird, mentioned by Howell and Prince, is said to have been to Mrs. E. Weston's eldest brother on his death-bed." This occurrence of the apparition must have been therefore a generation later than the previous instance quoted. No further particulars of this incident are now obtainable.

We are taken a further step in chronological order by the next case, which is said to have happened at Sidmouth. The evidence, it will be observed, is of rather shadowy character, and there are some variations from the previous order of the apparition. I extract the following from a now somewhat rare little book—*A Descriptive Sketch of Sidmouth, &c.*:*

"At the end of Mill lane, on the left, some years since, stood a large old-fashioned brick mansion, in which died one of the family of the Oxenhams, of which tradition records the strange and wonderful story, that at the death of any of them, a bird with a white breast is seen for a while fluttering about their beds, and then suddenly to vanish away. [He then goes on to quote Howell, &c.] In further reference to this tradition, I beg to insert an extract from a letter received from a highly-esteemed and valued friend on the subject:

"'My dear Sir,—I give you, as well as I can recollect, the anecdote related to me by a late respected baronet of this county. He told me that, having read in Howell's *Anecdotes* of the singular appearance of a white bird flying across, or hovering about the lifeless body of the different members of the Devonshire Oxenham family, immediately after dissolution, and also having heard the tradition in other quarters, wishing rather for an opportunity of refuting the superstitious assertion than from an idea of meeting with anything like a confirmation; having occasion to come to Sidmouth shortly after the death of his friend Mr. Oxenham, who resided in an old mansion, not now standing, and the place of which is now occupied by the houses called *Sidlands;* he questioned

* By Theodore H. Mogridge, Esq., Sidmouth [1836].

the old gardener, who had the care of the house, as to who attended his master when he died, as Mr. O. had gone there alone, meaning only to remain a day or two. "I and my wife, sir," was the reply. "Were you in the room when he expired?" "Yes, both of us." "Did anything in particular take place at that time?" "No, sir, nothing." (But then, after a moment's pause), "there was indeed something which I and my wife could almost swear we saw, which was a white bird fly in at the door, dart across the bed, and go into one of those drawers; and as it appeared in the same way to both of us, we opened all the drawers to find it, but where it went to we could never discover." If I recollect rightly, the man on being questioned had not heard of the tradition respecting such appearances, and that he was not prepared by previous instruction to confirm the story seems more than probable by his only mentioning it at second thought, as though he hardly supposed the baronet's inquiry had reference to anything supernatural, and by his not more positively making the assertion, which it seems probable he would have done had he any end to answer by making up the story.'

* * * * *

"This old mansion is no longer in existence, having been pulled down." (pp. 48–51.)

Mr. Mogridge, the author of the book, a medical man, in commenting upon the incident, did not seem to doubt that it was a special supernatural revelation.

This Mr. Oxenham, who, according to Butcher's *Beauties of Sidmouth*, third edition (1821?), had been for many years a resident at Sidmouth, appears to have died between the years 1810 and 1821. He was not buried there, and I have been unable to make out his identity.

If the series had ended here, these remarkable alleged manifestations of the omen might probably have been set down as some of the illusions of a pre-scientific age. The next case which I shall have to adduce is that of the last known appearance of the phenomenon, and is the more interesting and important because it is given on the authority of a member of the Oxenham family now living, confirmed by a lady (also a member of the family, and still living) who actually witnessed the occurrence. A short notice of the incident appeared in *Glimpses of the Supernatural*,* published in 1875, and was communicated by the Rev. Henry Nutcombe Oxenham, the present head of his family, who is favourably known as the author of some able theological works. Mr. Oxenham, whose courtesy I take the opportunity of acknow-

* By the Rev. FREDERICK GEORGE LEE, D.C.L.

ledging, and to whom I express my obligations, has kindly favoured me with a more detailed account of the incident, which I here give in his own words:

"Shortly before the death of my late uncle, G. N. Oxenham, Esq., of 17, Earl's Terrace, Kensington, who was then the head of the family, this occurred: His only surviving daughter, now Mrs. Thomas Peter, but then unmarried, and living at home, and a friend of my aunt's, Miss Roberts, who happened to be staying in the house, but was no relation, and had never heard of the family tradition, were sitting in the dining-room, immediately under his bedroom, about a week before his death, which took place on the 15th Dec., 1873, when their attention was roused by a shouting outside the window. On looking out they observed a white bird—which might have been a pigeon, but if so, was an unusually large one—perched on the thorn-tree outside the windows, and it remained there for several minutes, in spite of some workmen on the opposite side of the road throwing their hats at it, in the vain effort to drive it away. Miss Roberts mentioned this to my aunt at the time, though not of course attaching any special significance to it, and my aunt (since deceased) repeated it to me soon after my uncle's death. Neither did my cousin, though aware of the family tradition, think of it at the time. Miss Roberts we have lost sight of for some years, and do not even know if she is still living; but Mrs. Thomas Peter confirms in every particular the accuracy of this statement. Of the fact, therefore, there can be no reasonable doubt, whatever interpretation may be put upon it. My cousin also mentioned another circumstance, which either I did not hear of, or had forgotten; viz., that my late aunt spoke, at the time, of frequently hearing a sound like the fluttering of a bird's wings in my uncle's bedroom, and said that the nurse testified to hearing it also."

There would, of course, be nothing actually remarkable in the incident itself which is described in the earlier part of this account, if it were not taken in connection with the precedent tradition. If only a coincidence, it must be considered to be a very striking one. The departure from the accepted description of the ominous bird, which is certainly distinguished in the earlier stage of the story as only "white breasted," would perhaps be unimportant if it did not lead to an inference (physiologically interesting) that the semi-domesticated pigeon, of no particular colour, may have been the bird really connected, in every instance, with the phenomena. Mr. Oxenham states that the bird has always been

thought of and spoken of in his family simply as "the white bird."

On my pointing out to Mr. Oxenham that at least the earlier notices of his family tradition did not seem to warrant his supposition that the apparition was limited to the "head of the family," he informed me that, so far as he was aware, it had always been the oral tradition in the family that the bird was "bound" to appear before the death of the *head of the family*, and that it might or might not appear at other deaths, but certainly not that it always did so. Mr. Oxenham, who was himself a boy at the time, does not remember hearing of any appearance of the omen to his great-uncle, Richard Oxenham, the head of the family in the previous generation, who died August 23, 1844, at Penzance. He was a bachelor, and lived alone, and only his sister, Mrs. Oddy, who herself died in 1861, was with him at the time of his death. It certainly was not seen at the death of the Rev. William Oxenham, Vicar of Cornwood and Prebendary of Exeter, younger brother of the above, six months earlier, February 23, 1844, nor at the death of either of the younger brothers of the late head of the family, G. N. Oxenham, Esq., before-mentioned. On the other hand, it is stated by a relative of the family, now living, that when Mrs. Oddy died, her daughter, now dead, spoke of birds flapping and hopping at the bedroom window the night before.

Our forefathers, notwithstanding the opposite sentiment which is embodied in the familiar ballad of the "Children in the Wood," which, however, does not seem to have been traced farther back than the beginning of the 17th century, preferred, on the whole, the contemplation of the darker side of the bird-world. Hence, the influence of birds was more often accounted decidedly malevolent. "A bird of ill omen," is a phrase which has come down to us with all the air of antiquity. Spenser gives an appalling list of disreputable birds. But, as I have already remarked, it does not appear that the Oxenhams regarded their particular bird-omen as otherwise than beneficent.

Mr. William Henderson, in his *Notes on the Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties*,* says that "the flying or hovering of birds around a house, and their resting on the window-sill or tapping against a pane, portends death," and that this belief is widely spread. The same belief is not uncommon I am told in Devonshire, although I have not found it

* Published for the Folk-Lore Society. Ed. 1879, p. 49.

recorded in the folk-lore collections of our Association. And it has an old place in our literature. It occurs in connection with a tragic incident in the story of *Thomas of Reading*, which was printed before the year 1600. "Said he, I am not sicke, but such an alteration I finde in my selfe as I never did before. With that the scritch-owle cried pitiously, and anon after the night-raven sate croaking hard by his window. Iesu have mercy upon me, quoth hee, what an ill-favoured cry doe yonder carrion birds make, and therewithall he laid him downe in his bed, from whence he never rose againe."* And Marston, who was a contemporary of Shakspeare, thus refers to it:

—— "and night-crowes screech aloud,
Fluttering 'bout casements of departing soules."†

Aubrey, as might be expected, has some instances in his *Miscellanies* of the preternatural appearances of birds. And one of the accounts of the Lyttelton ghost, which created a sensation a hundred years ago, describes the fluttering of something like a bird among the curtains of the bed. This led a facetious newspaper-writer of the year 1779—much in advance of his time—to think that future "linguists," as he calls them, would discover in this record the origin of the familiar phrase, "A little bird told me," which, however, is, I believe, as old as Solomon.‡ In the *Gentleman's Magazine* of November, 1786, there is an account of the strange appearance of a bird before death to two successive generations of the Pearce family, of Cranbrook, in Kent. But there are some better authenticated modern instances, which will bear repeating. The following is from *The Life, Times, and Correspondence of the Right Rev. Dr. Doyle, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin*, by W. J. FitzPatrick, LL.D., &c. (new edition, 1880.) Describing the Bishop's last illness, the author says: "Considering that the season was midsummer and not winter, the visit of two robin redbreasts to the sick-room may be noticed as interesting. They remained fluttering round, and sometimes perching on the uncurtained bed. The priests, struck by the novelty of the circumstance, made no effort to expel the little visitors, and the robins hung lovingly over the Bishop's head until death released him." (vol. ii. p. 505.) This was at Braganza, Carlow. Dr. Doyle died June 15, 1834. To the same

* THOMS'S *Early English Prose Romances* (1858), vol. i. p. 151.

† *Tragedies and Comedies*, 1st ed., 1633. Antonio and Mellida, part ii. act iii. scene 3.

‡ "For a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter."—*Ecclesiastes* x. 20.

work I am indebted for the notice that a pigeon was frequently mentioned as having been the associate of Pope Pius IX. in his last illness, and was stated to have hovered over the catafalque which contained his remains. Mr. Henderson, from whose work I have already quoted, says: "I am permitted to mention that the recent death of a clergyman of some eminence in the town of Hull was preceded by the flight of a pure-white pigeon around the house, and its resting again and again on his window sill."*

Hereditary omens, peculiar to certain families, are another phase of popular belief which is equally apposite to the present review. The presence of a pair of owls on the battlements of Wardour Castle, the traditional death-warning of the Arundel family, is one of the best known of these. There is a copious list of such supposed phenomenal appearances, which are also remarkable for their varied and, sometimes, fantastic character.

As these stories, apart from their mythical accretions, have been in all probability only half told, they offer no clue to any psychological explanation of the strikingly similar appearances of the Oxenham tradition; but they may have some significance when we approach the physiological aspect of the phenomena.

The credibility of the occurrence of the four consecutive appearances of the Oxenham omen in the year 1635, rests upon the two pieces of documentary evidence which have been given at length. Setting aside a suspicion, suggested by the fact of two witnesses being brought forward for each instance, that the author of the narrative in the tract may have been a little too anxious for the statutory completeness of his case, there appears to be no reason to doubt that the six individuals who constituted the witnesses really believed that they saw what they asserted that they saw. I am disposed to go further, and to think that they were not mistaken in the fact; although it is to be assumed that they were illiterate, and that their impressions were strengthened, and the details of the incident exaggerated and coloured, by the traditional occurrence of the same kind in the family twenty years before; and there may have been a still earlier tradition deeply rooted in the minds of the elderly people. As for the rest, the remarkable array of corroborative testimony by which the facts were accredited—that of the clergyman, of the bishop, and of the squires and ladies whose names

* *Notes on the Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties*, p. 49.

were cut upon the monument (an emphatic and remarkable avowal of their belief)—can be seen to amount only to a general conviction of the honesty and veracity of those six witnesses. That the strange appearances at Zeal Monachorum were attributed, at the same time, to supernatural causes is not surprising; the period was one in which the popular belief in portents, apparitions, and such like prodigies, was very general, and by no means confined to the ignorant and illiterate. Shakespeare was probably only describing the popular misconceptions of his own time when he wrote—

> "No natural exhalation in the sky,
> No scape of nature, no distemper'd day,
> No common wind, no customèd event,
> But they will pluck away his natural cause,
> And call them meteors, prodigies, and signs,
> Abortives, présages, and tongues of heaven." *

When, as we know, witchcraft was accepted as a fact by some of the highest intellects of the time, nothing was wanting to justify to the popular imagination the reality of other phases of supposed extra-natural agency. I see no reason for supposing that this belief was more prevalent in Devonshire than elsewhere, whatever may be said of the persistency with which it has kept its ground in the West to the present day. That the bishop, whose *imprimatur* was set upon the remarkable record of the occurrences at Zeal Monachorum, was of the same way of thinking we are not left in any doubt. He was the able and eminent Joseph Hall, a poet and a satirist in early life, and in mature age a divine whose writings held a high place in the theological literature of the seventeenth century. I am not aware of any special reference, in his voluminous works, to these particular circumstances; but it is significant that in one of his books he vouched for the supernatural origin of the famous cure of a cripple at St. Maderne's well in Cornwall, of which he states that he made a "strict and personal examination;" and in his *Invisible World*, under the section of "The Employments and Operations of Angels," he deliberately pronounced his opinion that the effects of the memorable storm which caused the partial destruction of Widdecombe Church, three years after the events at Zeal Monachorum, were "plainly wrought by a stronger hand than Nature's."

There is, however, more incitement to our curiosity when we come to inquire into the historical (so to speak) and comparatively recent alleged appearances to the Oxenham

* *King John*, act iii. sc. 4.

family, which cannot off-hand be set down as fictitious or illusory. Most of these are now beyond the reach, if not of criticism, certainly of exact scientific investigation. The last instance, which has been described as having occurred at Kensington, stands upon somewhat different ground. It has been sifted as far as possible, and it has been seen with what result. It combines in itself two characteristic aspects of the phenomenon—firstly, the attempt of a bird to find an entrance to the house; and secondly, its quasi-mysterious presence in the sick-chamber. The general resemblance to the traditional circumstances of the apparition is sufficiently complete.

In the Oxenham family I have reason to believe that no decided conviction obtains as to the cause of the appearances, the reality of which is however not doubted. But it is no secret that a belief in the supernatural—in other words, miraculous—origin of the phenomena has been revived elsewhere. It is plainly implied by the context in *Glimpses of the Supernatural*, a work of great earnestness, however unscientific may be its tone, to which I have already referred. Upon this view of the case I shall not venture to make any comment. It may no doubt be fairly contended that the whole question of supernatural appearances is, and always must be, an open one.*

On the other hand, those of a diametrically opposite school of thought will probably be of opinion that the earliest notions about the Oxenham omen were merely imaginative, and had their origin in some half-forgotten folk-lore, and that all the subsequent supposed manifestations of it have been equally imaginary, and may be traced to the impression produced by Howell's familiar letter, on the well-known principle that prophecies often bring about their own fulfilment. This was, in effect, the explanation suggested by the Messrs. Lysons.

With regard to the purely psychological and more recondite methods of accounting for the hallucinations—if they be so—it may be remarked that it would seem obvious that the "subjective" theory, by which no doubt spectral illusions may be often explained, cannot be applied to the cases now before us. It will be noticed that there is no very clear intimation that the apparition, in the various instances recorded, was always

* No one who remembers the remarkable correspondence, extending to upwards of eighty letters, on the "Truth about Ghosts," which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* of October, 1881, will doubt the perennial interest which this question has for minds of every degree of intelligence.

actually seen by the moribund member of the Oxenham family; in only one instance is it distinctly stated to have been so; and, if this is to be assumed, the apparition is stated to have been always equally or more conspicuous to others. Even this, it appears, is not an insurmountable difficulty; for we learn that as "the brain function has the power of projecting mental pictures on to the retina" (which is how ghosts are seen), so "if one person sees a vision, or spectre, anyone else who is in sympathetic or harmonious nerve-vibration with him may see it too."* But into this speculative region I do not care to follow the subject further.

Other attempts of course have been made to account for the appearances of the bird of the Oxenhams. One of these is to be found in the extremely interesting notes by Mr. W. Burt, appended to Carrington's *Dartmoor*, 1834. (Vol. i. p. 199.) This interpretation of the story is an eminently naturalistic one. Referring to the Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*, PENNANT)—

> "—— the solitary bird, that makes
> The rock his sole companion ——,"

a bird which Pennant had seen but three or four times, and always on Dartmoor, and which Morris figures with a half-moon shaped bar of white across its breast, Mr. Burt says that with it (but he does not state where the interesting fact is to be found) "has been connected the tradition respecting the appearance of a white bird before the death of anyone of the family of Oxenham of South Tawton. . . . The accidental appearance of this bird at Oxenham, attracted thither by the light in the sick-chamber, or by some other cause, may have given rise to the tradition, and the more particularly as the moor is close to South Tawton, and the Ring Ouzel frequents that part of it. There is no other rational mode of accounting for such a singular circumstance. This happening in one instance was extended, by superstition, to other cases of death in the same family."

Reverting to the narrative of the circumstances which occurred in 1635, as recorded in the tract, it is to be noticed that all the four members of the family died within a few days of each other, and, for anything that appears to the contrary, in the same house. It was an impressionable time, and the unwonted appearance of a bird flying within the house, and at night, may have been easily magnified by superstition into the phantom "in the likeness of a bird," for

* Dr. MORTIMER GRANVILLE in the *Daily Telegraph* of Oct. 7, 1881.

which it was taken. But that it was a real bird, and the same bird, in all the cases, it now requires no great stretch of imagination to believe. Opinions will inevitably differ as to the weight of the evidence for the reality of the subsequent alleged appearances of the same kind, which has been here adduced from various sources. An isolated case of this sort might or might not be easily disposed of by one of the recognized formulas. The persistency of the so-called omen of the Oxenhams, occurring at intervals throughout a period of two centuries and a half, all of which cases have strikingly similar details and characteristics, if there were no other concatenation than the mental impressions produced by the prevailing tradition, would alone be very remarkable. But there may appear to be in these occurrences a core of fact which it is scarcely possible to ignore. The like causes, or combination of causes, have produced the like effects. To assert that we must go outside Nature for an explanation of phenomena such as these, which transcend our ordinary experience, is equivalent to saying that all Nature's secrets are already known to us. It seems, therefore, reasonable to assume that either the circumstances have been imperfectly described, or that there is some natural explanation of them which it is at present impossible to recover. And we may be almost sure that if a satisfactory physiological cause for the phenomena is to be found, it will be discovered rather in collateral circumstances, which have *not* been noticed or described, than in those with which we are now acquainted. As an apt illustration of the possibilities of this method of interpretation, I am reminded of the famous St. Kilda story, which posed Dr. Johnson, and is mentioned by Boswell. It had been stated solemnly by McAulay, who wrote an account of St. Kilda, and the fact was well attested by others, that on the arrival of a stranger at the island all the inhabitants were "seized with a cold." The cause, as ultimately explained, was of course a natural one. The situation of St. Kilda rendered a north-east wind indispensably necessary, in those days, before a stranger could land. The wind, not the stranger, occasioned the epidemic. The principle is one of general application.

I commend the problem to physiologists. The supposed limitation of the appearances of the Oxenham omen to the heads of the family—the strongest support perhaps of the supernatural theory—is no doubt an accretion, the natural growth of the tradition, and certainly not warranted by the earliest part of the story itself. The apparition did not occur

to every member of the family, simply because some necessary condition was not always present. I believe that a physiological solution of the problem may be found, and that *heredity*, of the force and effect of which we have probably little conception, and the marvellous instinct of animals, of which we know as little, are the keys to it. The idea is crude, but not new. I have not professed, however, even to treat of this difficult part of the subject, much less to exhaust it, and I have no pretension to advance any formal theory of my own. As it is, it has been felt to be an ungracious task to strip a time-honoured tradition of any of its mythical surroundings; but there need be no fear that the tradition will not maintain its place for a long time to come among the established memorabilia of the county. The suggestions which I have ventured to make in aid of a natural explanation of the phenomena described have insensibly grown out of my review of the literature of this very curious Devonshire story.

Mystery giant salamanders of the world part one

Shane Lea and Richard Muirhead

Welcome to a new investigation into another obscure group of cryptids. This time we are looking at mystery giant salamanders. Deep in the heart of Sasquatch country, that is to say parts of California and Washington state, in isolated pools and streams, resides the Trinity Alps giant salamander, if several eyewitnesses are to be believed. According to "official" zoology the only giant salamanders in the world are in China and Japan (the Cryptobranchidae) and the hellbenders of the eastern and central United States. One of the best summaries of these reports was provided by Loren Coleman in Fortean Times # 103 , October 1997 (`Promises of Giants.`) "Keystone Mine Attorney Frank Griffith was one of the first on record to see giant salamanders in the Trinity Alps. It was during the 1920s, while he was hunting deer near the head of the New River. At the bottom of a lake, he spotted five, some 5-9ft (1.5m-2.75m) long. He caught one on a hook, but he could not pull it out. Hearing Griffith`s story, biologist Thomas Rodgers made four unsuccessful trips in 1948 to try to locate the creatures. He thought they might be Pacific giant salamanders, *Dicamptodon,* even though these are never bigger than a foot long. Perhaps they were a relict population of *Megalobatrachus,* the Asiatic giant salamander of the family Cryptobrachidæ, reputed to measure 5-6ft (1.5-1.8m)…" (1) In Copeia, June 1951, number 2, pp 179-180, George S. Myers (`Asiatic Giant Salamander Caught in the Sacramento River`) wrote : " In 1939 or 1940, I received a message to the effect that a Sacramento commercial fisherman had caught a "strange" animal which he had alive in his apartment. The animal was a fine Megalobatrachus (unquestionably identified generically by its closed gill openings), in perfect condition, alive in a wooden trough suspended in the bath tub, where I handled and examined it carefully for about 30 minutes. It was between 25 and 30 inches in length. Its captor said he found it in one of his catfish traps, set in the Sacramento River "below

Sacramento but above the delta". Probably this was not far from Walnut Grove...The source of the specimen is, of course, unknown. Its strange coloration even suggested the possibility of a native Californian *Megalobatrachus,* which would not be zoogeographically surprising, but no other captures have been reported…"(2) Coleman pointed out: " Nevertheless, it was a very different colour to those of the Japanese and Chinese species. It was dark brown, not slate grey as in the Asian types, and it had dull yellow spots, not ones that were darker grey as is found on the known giant salamanders…" (3). A few years after this a man called Vern Harden caught one of a dozen giant salamanders he had seen in a lake in the Trinity Alps. He measured it at 8ft 4 inches then released it. In 1960 a Father Hubbard " declared he had definitely established that the huge amphibians were in the Trinity region and would soon leave on another expedition…" (4). But no record of this expedition exists. Later in 1960 millionaire cryptozoologist Tom Slick took up an interest in the Trinity Alps giant salamanders but was not successful in finding any. According to Copeia 3 (September 1962) REPORT OF GIANT SALAMANDER IN CALIFORNIA by Thomas Rodgers ,the Sacramento River specimen witnessed by Myers was brought from " somewhere in China" by Wong Hong an odd fish fancier. In September 1960 Nathan Cohen, Thomas Rodgers and Robert Stebbins mounted an expedition for a hunt for the giant salamander and in 1962 Thomas Rodgers mounted an expedition but only collected "about a dozen *Dicamptodon,* the largest of which was 111/2in (30cm) long. Rodgers` final comment: "It is hoped that this evidence will kill rumours about any giant salamanders (much less *Megalobatrachus*) in the Trinity Mountains of California…" (5) However in 1997 Kyle Mizokami mounted an expedition to look for these cryptids but sadly returned with no further evidence. In 2021 there was another expedition to look for the Trinity Alps giant salamanders involving Ken Gerhard, Jamie Wayne, Jim Whitehead, Jason Kauntze and Daniel Alan Jones. It was not successful. It is possible that the giant salamanders observed in the 1920s were still alive in the 1990s because according to the Giant Salamander Animal Facts - AZ

Animals web-site one giant salamander lived seventy-two years. According to “Anonymous” in a reply to Raheel Mughal`s post `The Trinity Alps Giant Salamander` on the Cryptozoology Online blog of January 12th 2011: "Giant Hellbenders" are reported in the Ohio River valley in Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky.” Furthermore in a post on the Facebook Trinity Alps Giant Salamander Information and Discussion group by Daniel Alan Jones on August 4th 2022, citing a book The Best of Texas Folk and Folklore 1916-1954 : “ Along the New Mexican border is related a story of an enormous and extremely ferocious animal that formerly in- habited one of the salt lakes in Andrews County, Texas. It was an amphibious animal "resembling a great water dog" and was said to feed almost exclusively on ducks and other waterfowl. It was said to make a terrific noise as it ploughed its way through the water in the early morning, causing the ducks to arise in great flocks from the surface of the lake. It even put to hurried flight parties of gunners who became frightened at its ferocious appearance. A description of the animal given in a copy of a small plains newspaper of twenty-five years ago (unfortunately since lost) reminded one of the great prehistoric animals. "The "great water -dog' has not been reported in recent years.” Loren Coleman, in a post on the above mentioned Facebook group on March 7th 2023, mentioned the following: “The fossil record of North America does indeed include giant salamanders analogous to what's reported in the Cryptozoological literature ,I'm not saying I support giant extant salamanders I'm America (as we currently lack the evidence for that) _ what I am saying is it's plausible” According to Jim Whitehead on this Facebook group in early January 2023: “The Kiowa refer to "zemo'hgú-ani" a large predatory horned lizard that lives in rivers. That one is the most well known but some of the other tribes have seen them as well. I have about 10-12 sightings of what locally are called the "walking catfish" which sounds like a large neotenic salamander about 2-3 feet long. And interestingly enough, Time Life magazine did a article about monster legends and folklore in the US during the 50's. They placed a horned lizard like creature over

western Oklahoma and called it the "water monster", so apparently it was more well known in the past. The Kiowa were originally indigenous to the Great Plains. According to Karl Shuker`s Shuker Nature blog of May 20th 2015,` A giant mystery salamander from California and a giant very sillymander from Vietnam`, a woman he called "Prunella" in 2005 saw a salamander or newt ,reddish brown and mottled and 4-5ft long in Redwood Park in Arcata, California. Karl sent her a video of a hellbender and she said it was "so much bigger than the hellbender." In an e-mail to Karl she compared it with the Californian coastal salamander Dicamptodon tenebrosus. I found two old stories of "water dogs" which may have been giant salamanders. The first is from the Grant County Herald, Wisconsin, of November 10th 1920:"CATCHES WATER DOG Will Strickland of Galena made an unusual catch on his fish line while down the river Sunday. Instead of a fish he caught a water pup or water dog. It is seemingly a fish with four legs, or a cross between a fish and an alligator…" The second story is from The daily Alaska empire of October 17th 1934: IT IS A WATER DOG,NOT LIZARD,CLAIMS ANDERSON... Mr Anderson believes the specimen is an amphibian ,known as a newt or water dog. The only others he has seen in Alaska were along streams Ketchikan…" There is a different category of cryptids in the United States which might be a type of mystery giant salamander or mud puppy. They are large and pink and were investigated by the late American cryptozoologist Mark Hall in his `Wonders` volume 1 number 4 (December 1992). In Sobering Sights of Pink Unknowns, Hall states: " In my book Natural Mysteries I discussed the Giant Pink Lizards of Ohio, which appeared to be the larval stage of a giant salamander still unrecognized by establishment scientists. Two centuries ago they were common in the area of Scippo Creek." Hall then goes on to describe pink alligators in Florida in 1976 and a case near Charleston, S.Carolina of a pinky-orange creature that might have been a large(c. 6ft long) salamander or hellbender. This was around 1928. In around 1972 the famous cryptozoology author Ivan Sanderson saw a pinky creature in a swamp near his home in New Jersey that he compared to

a Tatzelwurm, which is a cryptid we will come onto in Part Two. Finally there is an account of a pink unknown from Vermont. Writing in his newspaper column "Fishy Tales" in the Rutland Herald of August 10th 1980, Charles Spenser mentioned a "pink crocodile" which may actually have been a larval stage giant salamander or mudpuppy in the headwaters of the Clarendon River. In British Columbia in Canada there is a large mystery black cryptid which may be a giant salamander known as a "black alligator." According to one web site—Cryptid Profile: Canadian Alligator (aka Pitt Lake Lizard) : " On October 10th, 1900, on the shore of Kootenay Lake, George Goudereau watched from a distance as a 12ft creature that roughly resembled an alligator crawled out of Crawford Bay and made its way towards a pile of rotten compost that had been collecting on land. George starred as the unknown creature used both its small, clawed hands and its snout to search for food within the pile. Eventually the creature finished its search and made its way back to the water. George made his way towards the location where he watched the creature rummage for scraps and took notice of a trail of webbed tracks in the loose sand and dirt that led both to and from the cold water... The second most often talked about sighting regarding the Alligator took place in 1915. Three men by the names of Charles Flood, Green Hicks, and Donald Macrae were in the area of Hope, British Columbia, when they came upon a small mud lake. Within this lake the men noticed what appeared to be small, almost baby looking alligators that were only a few inches long swimming around in the mud. What was striking to all three men were that the creatures were completely black in color and unlike anything they had ever seen before...In 1973, the third most famous sighting of the Canadian Alligator would take place on Pitt Lake. It is this specific lake that gives the creature is second (arguably more famous) name, the Pitt Lake Lizard. On June 3rd, married couple Warren and Sharon Scott watched in disbelief as a large number of creatures that resembled huge reptiles swam slowly through the water while closely grouped together…"(6) According to the book Strange Creatures Seldom Seen by John Warms: " One man from Pukatawagan whom I spoke with

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killed a brown four-foot crocodile-like creature in a log trap…"(7) Pukatawagan is a town in the far West of Manitoba, Canada. In a lake where the Winnipeg river enters Lake Winnipeg: " There, a few feet below the surface, was a larger version of the "mud puppies" they would sometimes snag with their fishhooks in the river– a small lizard-like black salamander. This one, with its large bulbous head, was identical in all aspects except in size, for it was about ten feet long. It swam like a crocodile using its legs, but its movement also had a snake -like appearance…" (8)

Shane writes:

> Monsters ARE real! 2 real-life animals that would qualify as being monsters, are the Japanese and Chinese giant salamanders. They really exist and grow up to 5-6 feet (not inches, feet!), in length. The Japanese giant salamander (Andrias japonicus) , is a mottled black and brown colour, with wart-covered-skin and is fully aquatic, living in the fast-flowing streams of Japan. It grows up to 5 feet in length and is the 3rd largest salamander in the world

. There is a curious legend of an impish, reptile-like being, in Japan, called the Kappa. They look for all the world like Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles! The Kappa is sometimes depicted as being bipedal and sometimes quadrupedal. According to Japanese legends, the Kappa had a propensity for abducting people and playing crude, sometimes cruel jokes on humans. The Japanese people clearly morphed something into a living legend, that represented Japanese humour and predilection for wrestling (we know how they love Sumo-wrestling). The Japanese clearly had fun with this legend. Could there be any truth behind these ribald tales? Quite possibly, the Japanese giant salamander was the original model for the legends of the strange Kappa beings. The Japanese giant salamander with it's imposing size, bizarre appearance and intimidating manner of darting out of nowhere and snatching prey, more than likely inspired fear, respect and superstition in the ancient Japanese people, long ago. That being said, a real animal, in this case an animal known to science, but, a real animal nevertheless, was probably the original template that formed the Kappa legends. These

legends originated in Japan, but, are famous worldwide. Could there be any truth to other legends, sightings or traditions of giant salamanders worldwide? Yes! The American state of California has had a long-standing history of reports of giant salamanders, among old-timers (miners, trappers, hunters), in and around the Trinity Alps region of northern California and other parts of northern California.

5 salamanders ranging from 5-9 feet long, were seen in a small lake, near the head-waters of the New River, by Frank L. Griffith, while hunting deer, in the 1920's.A giant salamander, 29-30 inches in length, was caught in the Sacramento River, around 1939, in a commercial fisherman's net. It was examined and identified by herpetologist George S. Myers, who identified it as a Megalobatrachus (I.e. an Asian giant salamander), due to it's closed gill openings. The specimen also displayed a unique colouration, with a dark brown back, sprinkled with small, dull, yellow spots, with an irregular outline, 1 centimetre in diameter. The animal appeared healthy and although claimed to be an escaped pet, the uniqueness of it's morphology points to more than just a prosaic origin.

In 1960, animal handler Van Harden from Pioneer, CA, reported that he had actually hooked 1 of 8 giant salamanders that he had seen in a Trinity Alps' wilderness lake. Harden claimed to have actually measured the hooked salamander at 8 feet, 4 inches (!), before he released it back into the lake. Catch and release. One of the earliest reports of a possible giant salamander in northern California, occurred in 1891, when the "head" of a gigantic lizard was seen in the Sacramento River, near Woodland, California. The poor animal was even shot at, as it attempted to climb out of the river and on to the shore. It was last seen swimming as fast as it could, away from there! Can you blame it? Now, who's the bigger monster, man or beast?

Similar reports of giant amphibians come from Canada, where they are often referred to as "black logs", or "black alligators". Assuming that these reports are genuine and reliable, what kind of amphibian could be responsible for the unique reports emanating from the Trinity Alps, Sacramento River and Canada? North America has many amphibian species, with 198 salamander species living in the United States and 21 in Canada. In the Ozark and Appalachian Mountains of the United States, there lives a giant salamander

called the Hellbender (Cryptobranchus alleganiensis). It is the largest salamander in North America, reaching lengths of up to 29 inches and lives in fast-flowing streams, like it's Asian relatives, the Japanese and Chinese giant salamanders. It too, is a member of the family Cryptobranchidae, just like the Chinese and Japanese giant salamanders. Could certain Hellbenders attain larger lengths? That would be one hell-of-a Hellbender! Pun intended. Larger Hellbenders are a distinct possibility. There could also be unknown populations of large Hellbenders in certain areas, possibly accounting for giant salamander sightings and reports

One other potential candidate for mystery giant salamander reports, is the Pacific giant salamander (Dicamptodon tenebrosus). They are endemic to California, the Pacific-North-West of the United States and Canada. They live in cold, mountain streams and lakes. Could the occasional acromegalic individual, account for these reports? Maybe. The Pacific giant salamander usually only reaches 13.4 inches in length. Acromegalic individuals could theoretically be larger. Acromegaly is a condition in which the body produces an excessive amount of growth hormone, due to an abnormality in the Pituitary Gland. The excessive amount of growth hormone, in turn, produces gigantism. An example in humans, is 7 foot, 2 inch actor Richard Kiel - "Jaws"- of the James Bond movies "The Spy Who Loved Me" and "Moonraker". Kiel also played Dr. Loveless' sidekick "Voltaire", in The Wild Wild West series. Also, Kiel, to the delight of cryptid fans worldwide, played two creatures of sorts, in the Kolchak The Night Stalker series- a giant Amerindian shaman spirit, called a Diablero and a Spanish Moss monster, from Creole legend, called Pere Malfait (father of mischief).
Isolated populations of animals can result in gigantism. But, the more large individuals you have and the larger the geographic area they cover, acromegaly and isolation become more untenable. The cases with groups of large salamanders, or cases featuring unusual colouration are much harder to explain away. Since North America already harbours a member of the family Cryptobranchidae (the same family that contains the giant Asian species), there could very possibly be an uncatalogued giant salamander existing there, closely related to the extant, giant Asian salamanders.
Fauna and flora wise, there are ancient connections between China and North America. Take alligators, for example. Alligators are only

found in 3 places, in the entire world, the United States, Mexico and China. This zoo-geographical relationship, shared between North America and China, is even more circumstantial evidence, for the possible existence, of a giant salamander, in the cold-water lakes and streams of California and Canada.

REFERENCES

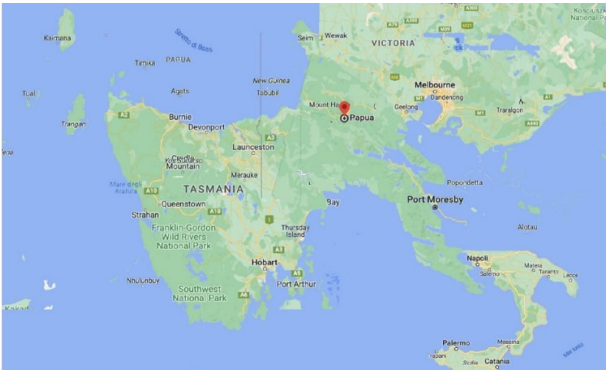
1. Loren Coleman. Promises of Giants. Fortean Times # 103. October 1997 p.43
2. George S.Myers. Asiatic Giant Salamander Caught in the Sacramento River. Copeia. June 1951 pp 179-180.
3. Loren Coleman Ibid
4. Loren Coleman Ibid
5. Thomas Rodgers. Report of Giant Salamander in California. Copeia. September 1962 pp 646-647
6. Cryptid Profile: Canadian Alligator (AKA Pitt Lake Lizard) - The Pine Barrens Institute
7. John Warms. Strange Creatures Seldom Seen. p. 168
8. John Warms. Ibid. p. 170.

Part Two will cover mystery giant salamanders in Europe and Asia

True believers see more patterns

Michela de Mattei

A full account of the 2015 Tasmanian tiger sighting in southern Tasmania can be read below. This information was taken from personal notes on the thylacine provided directly by witness Greg Booth in 2016 to Adrian Richardson. This sighting has long been told only in words, it travelled orally from one person to another, then in this empathetic channel has finally found its written publication. I believe it should be passed on to the cryptozoological community exactly as originally chronicled by Adrian Richardson. Greg Booth, the man who had the fortunate encounter with the thylacine, has sadly disappeared, no one can track him down and I like to imagine that he's hiding in the wild with our elusive creature: the thylacine.



TASMANIA

My contribution will consist of a personal digression that will follow the report also illustrated by some pictures - to be read as an additional track to trace the animal. I believe that digression, by its very form, can help the imagination to operate, expanding the narrative and forcing us to deviate and reinterpret the signs. Certainly everything would be solved if we had a sense of smell.

The Greg Booth Tasmanian Tiger Sighting 3.April 2015

Date Friday 3rd April 2015 **Time** 1:20 pm

Location Forestry track SW Tasmania

GR 6--9--

Weather condition Mild & 17 degrees C Persons present.

George (Joe) Booth (Retired Forester)

Greg Booth (Woodcutter)

The reason of being in the location.

Greg and Joe were having some valued father & son time together exploring a Tasmanian State forest. Joe was showing his son areas of bushland where he worked as a forester many years prior. Joe had remembered an overgrown track in the area that had been constructed during the Tasmanian early settlement days. The Dawson Track had been cut in and worked upon by convict labour that had to endure the tough terrain including the harsh penal conditions from many years ago. It was to be the last stop in the area before returning back to Joe`s home town of Ellendale. Greg was driving for his dad in his father`s Toyota single cab 4WD ute and was instructed to drive some 400 metres up a secondary forestry track and park the vehicle at a Y junction.

Background

In early April of 2015 I was notified by a friend from Wayatinah, a small town in the Tasmanian Central Highlands that an acquaintance of his had a Tasmanian tiger sighting. In the same conversation my friend informed me that the family involved were no longer talking to anyone about the sighting. Even though I was given a surname to follow up, I took my friends advice and decided to leave the family alone. The following month in May, Joe Booth an elderly retired forester who was present at the sighting, had written his record of events in (his own words) into The Highland Digest (Issue No 182 of May 2015, page 9).A footnote to Joe`s report indicated that another Tasma-

-nian tiger sighting had taken place only 3 kilometres away in the same area by a Log truck driver. As it turns out this separate incident is an interesting story from 2012 and that the Log truck driver (name withheld) had to stop his truck in fear of running over the animal.

Upon reading the Digest article written by Joe, I instantly felt from my previous thylacine research experience that this was a Tasmanian tiger sighting like no other and that there was much more to this story than what was written into the monthly local community newsletter. (Joe was 79 years old at the time of the sighting and of writing the article) Indeed there was more to the story, and at the time I did write into my thylacine journal notes that this encounter would awaken the scientific world. However this never happened as this sighting was not reported to the two major local newspapers or media outlets. The Tasmanian tiger sighting was only spread by word of mouth throughout the local rural community. By the 3rd of June 2015 (two months to the day after the initial sighting) I had completed 6 reconnaissance trips into the area trying to locate what I thought could have been the likely location of the sighting. The only bearings I had was the Dawson Road and this involved me having to drive some 1,400 kilometres during my research. It was my 6th and final trip (and taking photos) that I ended up only 50 metres shy of the actual sighting position which was indicated later when Greg and I were on our research trips in the area together. Greg was amazed by looking at the photographs that I had taken from my previous trips that I had stumbled into the actual position without a guide & only the use of 1:50,000 conventional maps.

It wasn`t until the following year in 2016 that I received a surprise phone call that came out of the blue from Greg Booth, asking if I would assist him with his own private search. When Greg made this initial phone call little did we know that we had met some 18 years prior as he was a partner to my wife`s niece. In hindsight really I should have made contact with Joe and Greg in April 2015 however at that time I did not relate that Joe was Greg`s father. Greg needed to be heard reference his sighting. He expressed in his (own words) the

sighting and of the countless times that he had reflections and images mirrored back to him from his flashbacks. Greg was very sincere and emotional when describing the animal he saw. Unfortunately Greg found some people within his rural local community had doubts that he had seen a Tasmanian tiger. (Like most of the general population, due to the fact that we have all been educated to believe that the Tasmanian tiger is extinct) Once again ridicule raised its ugly head just like it does with majority of Tasmanian tiger sightings here in Tasmania. The common phrase I hear is "don`t you know that the tiger is extinct". Ridicule is why many sightings are not reported to Tasmanian authorities. Greg to his credit did not in any way waiver from his original statement, including when he actually did a walk through on location of the tiger sighting with leading Tasmanian biologist Nick Mooney.

Greg stated in 2016 that he thinks of that tiger he saw at every waking moment and that he still gets flashbacks of the sighting. Two years on from his sighting (in 2017) Greg still couldn`t get his unprecedented tiger sighting out of his mind.

To give reflection to what Greg saw I believe at this point would be an ideal time to mention a quote by Brene Brown, an American professor & author. "In order to empathize with someone`s experience you must be willing to believe them as they see it, and not how you imagine their experience to be."

The Tasmanian Tiger Appeared from No Where.

As previously explained Joe`s vehicle was parked at the Y junction. The vegetation covering the area was rather thick with Tea tree, young and old eucalypt trees plus other species of trees including Myrtle and Celery Top Pine.by Forestry Tasmania (now this area had been logged several times before over many years named Sustainable Timber).

Greg was instructed by his father to walk and follow the forestry track back to where they had just driven while Joe would venture some 20 metres into the undergrowth to try and follow the old convict track

Impressively for a man of Joe`s age he is very active and could skilfully jump over logs and walk the thick undergrowth with ease. Greg was now moving down the forestry track and keeping in line with his father who was mostly unseen but could be heard from within the undergrowth following the old abandoned convict labour built track. Having walked some 400 metres down the track and around a bend Greg decided to stop and wait on the edge of the gravel and wait for his father to catch up with him. At this point of time Greg was thinking of rolling a cigarette and he was just staring and looking into the undergrowth. Directly in front of him the bush was rather thick and there was two large pushed or fallen eucalypt trees lying across the hidden convict track.

Greg was just staring into the undergrowth when his world of normality changed. As Greg said, it was then that everything suddenly happened. Out of the thick bush from under the closest fallen eucalypt tree came an animal and it walked directly towards him. The animal did not notice Greg until it got within approximately 3 metres or 10 feet from him. Both Greg and the animal were in shock & disbelief in meeting each other. (Greg told me that he was totally gobsmacked with this initial encounter and it was an animal that he had not seen before ever, in his time in the bush) It was at this point Greg stated that he realised he was looking at a Tasmanian tiger. On seeing Greg the Tasmanian tiger went into the seated position. The seated tiger and Greg just stared at each other. (One could not imagine what was running through Greg`s mind at this stage) Greg estimated that the time spent staring at each other would have been 5-6 seconds in duration. This is the reason how Greg managed to highlight the facial features of the animal in fine detail, including a scar above its right eye. The description of the thylacine given by Greg was rather extensive which included its dark and deep set eyes, with white patches below each eye with a very long snout, dark nose with a strong jaw line short ears with a tough thick neck. In his own words as he was describing the thylacine Greg said that the tiger was not a pretty ani-

mal to look at and it wasn`t in as good condition as his own domestic dog. (Greg`s dog being a solid well fed tan coloured French Boxer) The colour of its fur was short and not thick being no longer than 1cm or ½ inch in length and it was light tan. Once the initial shock of the meeting ended the seated tiger used its tail to assist itself to all four feet and pushed itself upwards some 70-75 cm prior to landing onto its front feet, just like a kangaroo would when it uses its tail to move. Greg noted that the front legs looked shorter than the rear legs .Once the Tasmanian tiger was standing on all four feet it turned to its right and started to walk onto the very edge of the gravel and move back up the forestry track heading towards the parked vehicle. Greg stated that the Tasmanian tiger stood at a man`s knee height of approximately 50-60 cm (2 feet) It was at this point Greg saw the rear opening pouch and the enlarged bottom area including the exposed anus region of the animal. Greg explained that the rear opening pouch was approximately 18 cm or 6 inches long, or about the length and size of a man`s open hand. It reminded him of seeing a Tasmanian Devils rear opening-pouch. The tiger had approximately 15 dark stripes running along its back and very little hair on its tail but there was a tuft of fur at the very end, and that the tiger`s tail was stiff and straight with a light kick up at the very end. In fact Greg stated that the tail was so straight you could put a builder`s spirit level on it and the vertebrae could be seen along the length of the tail. At some point Joe called out to Greg but he couldn`t respond properly as he was trying to keep up with the now trotting Tasmanian tiger that was moving back up the track and heading towards the parked vehicle. Greg couldn`t see the legs of the tiger at times due to the bush however he could see the top of the tiger as it moved in and out of the bush and onto the edge of the gravel track. Greg believes at this point while following the tiger he called for his father to get onto the track and follow him. The two distinctive points that Greg raised was when the tiger was trotting and moving up the track was how the dark stripes disappeared and blended into her light tan fur, and also how the animal

maintained its straight and stiff tail when moving. (Further discussions regarding the animal`s movements with Greg and he felt that the tiger was wanted to cross the track however refusing to cross due to Greg being in close proximity) Greg then watched the tiger go around the parked vehicle at the Y junction and then disappear into the Tea tree bushes heading into a westerly direction. Just as the tiger disappeared into the Tea tree Joe finally caught up and reached his son at the vehicle. Greg then explained what he had just seen to his father. Unfortunately Joe had not seen the Tasmanian tiger that he had disturbed and flushed out from the undergrowth on the old convict track, however he instinctively knew that it was a tiger that his son had seen and described to him. Joe then asked Greg was it a Tasmanian tiger that you just saw? Greg replied immediately with a definite yes! Greg said that prior to that day he had never really given any thought to the Tasmanian tiger and that he had believed the animal was extinct. (For someone that thought that the thylacine was extinct then Greg`s description and fine details were astonishing) Greg`s ability to observe and then describe (in his own words) were amazingly skilful. I had witnessed his observation skills on many occasions during our bush trips together when placing out game trail cameras.

Conclusion: One of the biggest problems Greg had following the sighting was trying to convince the nonbelievers that he actually stood only 3 metres or (10 feet) from the animal. Greg only wanted others to believe in what he had witnessed on that day. Greg had nothing to gain but plenty to lose as his personal credibility was at stake. On occasions Greg would say why me? And how come it happened to me? My reply to Greg was you were fortunate to have that close encounter and that statistically it is about the same as winning Lotto, as that is about 1 in 4 million chance of winning. You actually won Lotto except you didn`t win the money. People have asked Greg as to why he didn`t get a photograph of the tiger due to the length of his sighting? Greg was not carrying his mobile phone with him as it was on the seat in the vehicle parked at the Y junction. There is no mobile phone reception

in the area so it was left in the vehicle. Greg also stated that he wouldn`t have even thought of taking photographs with his mobile phone because the event was just so surprising and very quick. Greg also rightly stated, who walks around out in the Tasmanian bush with a mobile phone in hand? Greg stated that he saw the Tasmanian tiger a total of 3 times and each sighting being 5-6 seconds duration. Having walked this 400 metre track many times I believe that Greg may have under estimated his time when watching and following the thylacine moving in and out of the Tea tree scrub alongside the forestry track. Nick Mooney a leading Tasmanian biologist on the thylacine who went to the site mentioned to Greg and I that he too believed that the complete sighting time combined while watching the moving tiger would have been longer than the 6 seconds that was estimated by Greg. It is to be noted that Greg and Joe did not notify or report the tiger sighting to any local Tasmanian newspapers, or media outlets, or the Tasmanian Government Department of Primary Industries. Parks, Water & Environment (DPIPWE). The Greg Booth Tasmanian tiger sighting was spread only by word of mouth and the written by Joe in May 2015 issue of The Highland Digest article. The reason that I have documented the Greg Booth Tasmanian tiger sighting from 2015 is because if it wasn`t recorded directly from my witness notes that were taken in 2016 then this Tasmanian tiger sighting could possibly be lost forever.

Adrian Richardson

(Thylacine Research) 22 July 2020. *EXIT*

We think too much in terms of history, whether personal or universal. Becomings belong to geography, they are orientations, directions, entries and exits.(1) The Thylacine, a.k.a. the Tasmanian tiger, apparently exited history in 1936 only to re-enter it not long after. Since 7 September 1936 it has actually entered and exited many times: IN whenever someone claimed to have spotted it in the wild, OUT whenever someone else stated that it was a hoax. Exit is a technology-related concept, highly popular these days since S.Balaji wrote The Network

State, a controversial book in which he envisions a society that can reduce the influence of bad politics on people`s lives by building opt-in societies, places where individuals are free to enter and exit peacefully, run by technology. The fundamental idea behind the Network

State is to assemble a digital community and organise it to crowdfund physical territory. The main problem is that everything, including land, is turned over to techno-capital. A network state in practice can only be neo-colonialist, as significant amounts of capital would need to be raised to purchase enough land to give investors the confidence to pressure existing governments to concede to their desires. In all likelihood, land would be purchased in poor, previously colonized countries that can be more easily swayed by foreign capital (2)Putting aside these dangerous techno-capitalist theories, it seemed tempting and fertile for me to consider digital space as a parallel land where Tasmanian tigers still dwells. My search for the Thylacine thus began and developed in this de-materialised and highly populated land: the web. The

question of its actual survival is very much debated within online communities, but for me it was no longer a question of whether the animal exists or not. As far as I am concerned, the acts and effects that the Thylacine generates testify to its existence. My conviction since the start was ;never question its existence, but instead understand how it exists;. Rather, follow the path of the animal in the lives of the beings it connects. Tracking the living beings and the Thylacine in what holds them together. I therefore began to create my own cartography of these relationships. It was necessary to make room for this animal that we had already forgotten in the cold.

The thylacine allowed me to enter its unique and geographically decentralised territory, showing me parts of Tasmania, virtually annexed to some hidden corners of Australia or Papua Guinea. It guided me through the techno-diaspora of the many users participating in the Quest, through Discord servers, Facebook groups, IG pages, database lists, UK amateurs or passionate Sicilian students. The animal seems to peregrinate in many people`s lives. In particular, I have been interested to hear the accounts of those who have been lucky enough to encounter it in person. The abundance of sightings certainly proves that we cannot cope with the Tasmanian tiger`s demise, but it also made me realise that if the animal haunt us, it is vital to collect these visions and listen to what the animal has to say.

TO SLEEP FACE UP. Juanicu warned me, Sleep face up! If a jaguar comes he`ll see you can look back at him and he won`t bother you. If you sleep face down he`ll think you`re aicha (prey; lit., “meat” in Quichua) and he`ll attack. If, Juanicu was saying, a jaguar sees you as

being capable of looking back - a self like himself, a you, he`ll leave you alone. But if he should come to see you as prey - an it - you may well become dead meat.(3) We must be ready to look back, because the moment may come at any moment when an animal appears and stares at us. But what if this animal is an alien animal, or a creature that supposedly no longer exists? What kind of look will it give us and how will we see it? When I stared collecting sightings of thylacines, I realised that they all had a similar tone, the accurate account mixed with dreamlike details. Probably, since the thylacine is not a creature whose existence is recognised, the event of a sighting falls into the unofficial domain, making the character of all reports fall into an intimate and almost secret sphere. Witnesses, when given the opportunity to tell their story, add their innermost feelings and impressions. The animal in the course of their stories acquires a mysterious aura, and often takes on an increasingly hybrid form being compared to many other animals: it has a tail similar to that of a kangaroo, a dog-like stature but it is slightly more similar to a fox, and it also has the gait of a horse. The descriptions I received in my inbox shaped in my head a multifaceted creature, made up of different individuals and altogether quite graceful. Certainly of the order of things I have never seen and would love to see. But I think what Juanicu reminds us is that the way animals see us matters. Other kinds of beings -when standing in front of us - they get an idea of us, their own representation of who we are. And what might a Tasmanian tiger - declared extinct - think if it finds us face down? There is a kind of pride in sleeping looking up, as if we want to show our unconscious side and our vulnerability. Without the fear of having our eyes closed and not being in control. Being ready with our eyes closed. As if at any moment another being could arrive to share our most submerged part: the nocturnal flow of dreams.

In many cultures, sleep is not the solitary, consolidated eight-hour sleep that Western societies are used to. In some cultures, such as the Runa of Ecuador, sleep is a collective experience, largely exposed to the outside world and shared with others, humans, animals and plants. The night is fragmented, one wakes up in the middle of it to sit by the fire listening to the distant sounds of the forest or the strange dream of someone sitting across the fire. Sleep is segmented so that the dream world can spill over into the waking world. Practising and cultivating this nocturnal state allows one to experience what is usually impossible and to tune in to a world beyond the human. It is true that in a world that leaves little room for shadows, certain things can no longer be perceived, discovered or participated in. When the English colonisers arrived in Tasmania they were hit by the paradisiacal vision of this untouched natural landscape. A novel by M.Kneale tells the story of 20 English explorers who went to Tasmania on an expedition, firmly convinced that the true biblical Garden of Eden was located there. This fantasy doesn`t really match up with the reverse view, that of the Tasmanians. There is some evidence that Aborigines believed the white men were returned ancestor spirits. John West asserted that when Tasmanians died, they expected to re-appear as white men on an

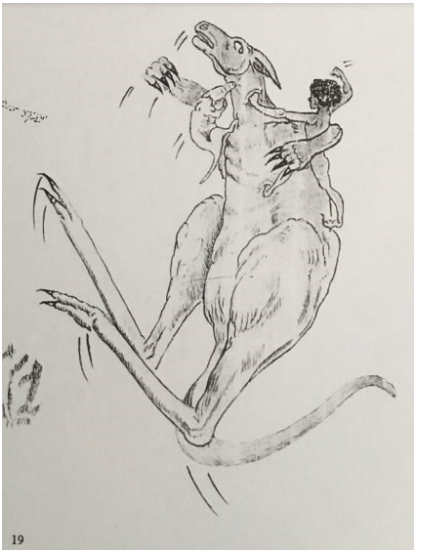
on an island in the Straits. Robinson`s observations also support this claim, he recorded on several occasions that Tasmanians went to

England when they died and an Aborigine born around 1820, wrote personally of this belief in later life, claiming: black people died then arose from the dead [and] became white men. How others see us matters. One cannot imagine what went through the mind of Greg Booth - the witness of the report transcribed here - in those five to six seconds when he and the sitting tiger stared at each other. However, I would be far more interested to know what was going through the head of the Tasmanian tiger.

NO ONE SHOULD EVER BE LEFT ALONE WITH A VISION

The fact that the thylacine returns and reveals itself to hundreds of people is a reality, then we can establish that there are many degrees of reality and investigate to which degree each sighting belongs. Since 1936, there have been many reports of this animal resurfacing as if it wanted to reclaim its habitat and re-include us in it. Because if Tasmanian tigers still survives somewhere in the wild, we, humans have in any case currently been cancelled.

Perhaps a few trees, many leeches, a few Tasmanian devils and a number of bacteria often encounter thylacines and continue to co-evolve with them. We co-evolve with its extinction, with its great lack. There is a tendency to mystify extinction, paraphrasing Van Dooren`s words, by making it coincide with the last individual of a species: as in the case of Benjamin, the last Tasmanian tiger. Asif, we witness the extinction event at the end, when the last individual dies: Benjamin`s demise would be equivalent to the death of a species. But long before that last death, all the relationships in which that animal was involved, both ecological and human, with the communities for which it provided meaning, broke down. This is the dullness of extinction: it is along, slow decay of ways of life that occurs long before the death of the last individual. In the case of TT, extinction began when man decided to decimate the entire tiger population, first ruining their reputation and then hunting them to the end. The variety of feelings, stories and cultural meanings that bound humans to thylacines gradually faded away. Every observation,



every glimpse should be shared collectively to re-establish a relationship with the animal on all levels and recreate its place in our lives. Tasmanian tiger`s affairs must be experienced, opposed, measured, enunciated, performed and narrated in various ways, to restore its rich ecological and cultural role. Is this perhaps the only way de-extinction can possibly occur? Perhaps only then will the Tasmanian tiger decide it has everything it needs to `opt -in` again.

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1. The bend in the section of the forestry track near the Y junction where the Tasmanian tiger disappeared into the bush in 2015.

2. Greg Booth standing at the position of where the Tasmanian tiger appeared from nowhere directly out from the undergrowth. The tiger then proceeded to walk towards Greg only stopping 3 metres (10feet) from him in 2015.

3. Joe and Greg Booth on the convict track and at the fallen eucalypt tree where the Tasmanian tiger first appeared in 2015.

4. Greg Booth walking on the forestry track where he had followed the trotting Tasmanian tiger in 2015.

THE SKUNK-WEED FACTOR
Richard George

The Daily Telegraph has an interesting feature tucked away on its back page called Nature Notes. On March 24 this year (2023) this reported on a striped skunk (*mephitis mephitis)* discovered in a hedgehog house near Reading. A spokesperson for Marwell Zoo commented "There has been talk of skunks living [in the UK] in the wild..."There certainly has ! In 2009 the Daily Mail published an article about a colony of striped skunks in the Forest of Dean (which must be quite crowded, what with wild boars, unidentified homunculi and yetis !) Several hundred skunks, they claimed, were being kept as pets throughout the UK. In 2007 it was made illegal to "de-scent" them, and this apparently led some breeders to let their stock loose, in a repeat of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act scenario of 1976 (1). Mark Hows saw one of these Forest of Dean skunks in 2009, but claims the colony was extinct by 2013 (2). Since the Daily Mail article, however, there has been almost an embarrassment of skunk appearances online. Here's a chronological list:

Tredegar 10.9.09 (3) Possibly an escapee from the Forest of Dean posse. I don't know the Collective Noun for skunks – a "miasma", possibly ?

Stourport, Worcestershire 7.11.10 (4)

A roadkill specimen, and a superior article, with photograph, from Worcestershire Biological Records Centre magazine (p.42). A skunk, presumably this one, was also filmed here on Youtube a few days earlier.

Coventry 16.10.15 (5)

Surrey (not specified) 13.9.17 (6)

Captured by a Pest Controller. See also (9) below.

Worksop 22,10.21 (10)

Sheffield 28.3.22 (11)

Colchester 27.7.22 (12)

On ITN, no less.

Then the sighting near Reading with which I began. There are also unconfirmed and undated reports from Scotland (13), and presumably an April Fool's piece from 2019 about a Chingford and Epping Forest skunk named "Pongo" (14). Zoological Feast of Fools jests almost merit an article on their own (there's a Steller's Sea Cow one, shamefully). This skunk-based one seems singularly unimaginative: a much better one, from a few years back, was "Polar Bears moving south due to global warming and scavenging in Glasgow". Evidently, striped skunks are increasingly popular pets, and adept at escaping. *Mephitis mephitis,* in its home in the Americas, is a habitat generalist, and can survive in temperatures ranging from northern Mexico to Canada. In my opinion, naturalisation in the UK, and elsewhere in Europe, is a distinct possibility. There have already been brief colonisations in Germany (1994) and the Netherlands (2000) (15).

All together now, in honour of the Stourport specimen:

Dead skunk in the middle of the road,

Dead skunk in the middle of the road,

Dead skunk in the middle of the road,

Stinking to high heaven !

Loudon Wainwright III

Not forgetting Jeff "Skunk" Baxter's sublime guitar solos with Steely Dan.

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Further Discoveries in the 'Deep-Sea Arachnid' Mystery

by Kate Shaw of Strange Animals Podcast (strangeanimalspodcast.blubrry.net)

In the late 1980s, a program called DISCOL 1 was launched to study disturbances on the sea floor due to underwater mining. It focused on the deep sea in the South Pacific. One of the things the expedition did was drop underwater cameras with a bait tied to them. When an animal came to investigate the bait, the camera took pictures.

In February 1989, the camera descended to about 13,600 feet, or 4,150 meters, in the Peru basin. When it was hauled up a few days later and the pictures retrieved, the investigators saw something they didn't recognize on twenty of the photos. It looked like a spider.

The animal's body was about two and a half inches long, or 6 centimeters, and about half that width, not counting its long, jointed legs. It had ten pairs of appendages, including three pairs of long legs that the scientists thought might be walking legs. The other two pairs of appendages were longer and might be feelers of some kind, with the front pair possibly used to manipulate food. The estimated legspan was almost 8 inches, or more than 20 centimeters.The scientists published a short article about the finding later in 1989 and proposed that the animal be tentatively placed in the phylum Arachnida with spiders and their relations.

In his book *The Search for the Last Undiscovered Animals*, Karl Shuker reported on this finding and pointed out that if the classification of the animal as an Arachnid was correct, it would be the first discovery of a living deep-sea spider known to science. While some modern spiders have evolved to live in water at least part of the time, they always have to have access to the air.

For a long time that's all anyone knew. Most scientists thought the animal was probably a pycnogonid, an arthropod commonly called a sea spider although it's not actually an arachnid.

Sea spiders live throughout the world's oceans and there are well over a thousand known species. Most are small and live in

shallow water, but a few live in water up to 23,000 feet deep, or 7,000 meters. The biggest species live in the cold waters around Antarctica, with the very largest individual ever found having a leg-span of about 27 inches, or 70 centimeters.

The sea spider has four pairs of legs, although a few species have five or six pairs of legs instead. Some species have one or two pairs of simple eyes, but other species have no eyes at all. The body is quite small in relation to the legs, which are extremely long, which means the digestive tract is actually partly in the legs, because the body is too small for it. It walks along the bottom of the ocean or may swim by pulsing its long legs like a jellyfish pulsing its bell.

All this does sound a lot like the spider-like animal photographed in 1989. But in 2004 a new paper was published about it, where the original scientists teamed with some other experts to re-examine the photographs. Their conclusion is that the mystery animal wasn't a spider or a sea spider but something else, a munnopsidid isopod. Isopods are crustaceans that have been around for at least 300 million years. They live all over the world, on land and in both fresh water and in the ocean. The animal sometimes called the woodlouse or pill bug or roly-poly or sow bug is actually an isopod. All isopods have segmented exoskeletons and all have two pairs of antennae and seven pairs of jointed legs.

Isopods are very common animals in the ocean and the most common isopods are members of the family Munnopsidae. Most have short legs but some have long legs, including some species in the subfamily Bathyopsurinae.

While Munnopsids are common, there are only four species in two genera in Bathyopsurinae. The biggest isopods live in the deep sea and while these four species are pretty big, up to two and a half inches long, or 6 centimeters, they're nowhere near the size of the largest isopods known. That would be the giant isopod that can grow up to 20 inches long, or 50 centimeters, but it's not closely related to these four species.

As to which species the mystery isopod belongs to, the photographs aren't close enough or clear enough for a definite identification. It's possible the mystery isopod belongs to a species unknown to science.

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Ant mills

Bob Skinner and Richard Muirhead

On February 6th 2023 Bob Skinner sent me a link to a video featuring on Facebook connected to the Sciwriter.org organisation which showed a group of ants walking rapidly in a circular motion around a small rock. This is known as an ant mill. The following explanation can be found next to the video on Facebook: " An ant mill is an observable phenomenon in which a group of army ants becomes separated from the main foraging party ,loses the phemerone track, and begins to follow one another, forming a continuously rotating circle, which is commonly referred to as a "death spiral" because the ants may eventually die of exhaustion…" Below is an image Bob provided of the "death spiral" taken from the video just mentioned above.

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Death Spiral
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An ant mill is an observable phenomenon in which a group of army ants becomes separated from the main foraging party, loses t... See more

According to William Beebe in his Edge of the Jungle: (1921) about his adventures in the jungles of South America, referring to an ant mill , observed: " It was the most astonishing thing and I had to verify it again and again before I could believe the evidence of my eyes. It was a strong column, six lines wide in many places, and the ants fully believed that they were on their way to a new home, for most were carrying eggs or larvæ, although many had food, including the larvæ of the Painted Nest Wasplets. For an hour at noon during heavy rain, the column weakened and almost disappeared, but when the sun returned, the lines rejoined, and the revolution of the vicious circle continued. There were several places which made excellent points of observation, and here we watched and marvelled. Careful measurement of the great circle showed a circumference of twelve hundred feet. We timed the laden Ecitons and found that they averaged two to two and three quarter inches a second. So a given individual would complete the round in about two hours and a half. (1)

According to an online Daily Mail article of March 23rd 2012, `How to make ants commit suicide by going into a `spiral of death` (which doesn`t always go anti-clockwise) : "Most ants navigate by using eyesight, but some army ants are completely blind – and it's possible for them to become disorientated and march in circles until they die of exhaustion. It's known as an 'ant mill' and is one of the strangest sights in nature. Army ants navigate by following pheromone trails left behind by others. However, should enough of them lose the scent they begin to follow the ant immediately in front and a huge ant spiral forms.The creatures are then unable to break free, owing to their lack of sight, and march around in a loop until they drop dead. What's more, it is possible to force them into this bizarre behaviour – though obviously it's an act of cruelty to the ants. You simply divert the ants into an enclosed space such as a plant pot. The largest ant mill ever discovered was a staggering 1,200 feet in diameter, with each ant completing a circuit in two and a half hours…" (2)

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Ice spikes

Bob Skinner and Richard Muirhead

Bob Skinner kindly passed onto me the following photo and story from the Farnham Herald of January 26th 2023 and the person who took the photo and provided the newspaper with the background story, who wishes to remain anonymous, kindly gave me permission to publish the photo here.

The text accompanying the photo is as follows: " SPIKE IS AN ICE SURPRISE. Hindhead home-owner X was surprised to find a rare natural phenomenon sticking out of her bird bath during the current cold snap.

The 30cm ice spike, which formed in X`s garden in Tuesday last week , is a sight that is said to be quite rare and happens only under specific weather conditions. The spike, which is made entirely of ice, is said to be a result of supercooled water droplets that freeze instantly

upon contact with a surface.

Ice spikes only form when there is a gentle breeze and the temperature drops to freezing or below. Ice spikes are not often observed in nature. However, they have been known to form on roofs, trees and other surfaces during extremely cold weather.

According to Wikipedia: " An **ice spike** is an ice formation, often in the shape of an inverted icicle, that projects upwards from the surface of a body of frozen water. Ice spikes created by natural processes on the surface of small bodies of frozen water have been reported for many decades, although their occurrence is quite rare. A mechanism for their formation, now known as the Bally–Dorsey model, was proposed in the early 20th century but this was not tested in the laboratory for many years

Below: Hampshire ice spike. Inverted pyramid form.

Furthermore: "Naturally occurring ice spikes, often in the form of circular ice candles or polyhedral ice towers (usually triangular), are occasionally found in containers of frozen rainwater or tapwater. Water expands by 9% as it freezes into ice and the simplest shape

of an ice crystal that reflects its internal structure is a hexagonal prism. The top and bottom faces of the crystal are hexagonal planes called basal planes and the direction that is perpendicular to the basal planes is called the *c-axis*…"

According to Science Frontiers # 79 Jan-Feb 1992: "The readers of *New Scientist* continue to supply delightful observations of Nature's quirks. The following is from J. Turner, in Warwickshire:

I have in my garden a round red plastic container which holds water for the birds. In last winter's first hard frost, I found an odd ice formation in the bowl. Although the weather the previous day had been clement and the water was fluid, we had that night a sharp frost down to about -4°C. The following morning I noticed what appeared to be something sticking up out of the frozen water in the dish. On closer examination, it proved to be a solid 'spike' of ice, ending in an arrowhead. The ice was solid and came out of the side of the frozen water at an angle of about 45°. It was about 9 inches long and solid throughout." (Turner, Judy; "Spooky Spike," *New Scientist*, p. 54, November 2, 1991.)

Two weeks later, the same journal published two radically different explanations of the ice spike. G. Lewis called the spike an "ice fountain" and stated that it is due to the well-known expansion of water as it freezes. R. Blumen-feld, on the other hand, attributed the growth of the spike to the fact that water molecules on the surface and in surrounding air are electrical dipoles. In his view, a small defect in the ice's surface attracts polarized water molecules in the air, creating an outwardly growing structure. (Lewis, Geoff, and Blumenfeld, Raphael; "Sprouting Spikes," *New Scientist*, p. 58, November 16, 1991.)

Comment. Seldom does one find such engaging oddities discussed in American scientific publications. American scientists are too stuffy it seems."

Learning your ABCs

Grant White

Few moments can inspire such wonder or indeed such a feeling of trouser filling terror as when coming face to face with a large predatory cat. One need only glance through the bars of a zoo, into the eyes of a Tiger and wonder how you would cope being chased by one. In reality, I suspect not very well at all!

Although thought of by many as being apocryphal, there have in fact been several very real examples of ABCs (Anomalous Big Cats) in the UK. In 1980 a puma was caught in Inverness-shire following many years of sightings, thankfully not shot but captured and re-homed in the Highland Wildlife Park, where Felicity, as she was then named, lived out the rest of her life, before being unceremoniously stuffed and displayed in the Inverness Museum.

In 1976 the Dangerous Wild Animals Act curtailed carefree private ownership. Illegal ownership in private hands is impossible to estimate before that time. Who can tell how many big cats were out there initially, to escape or indeed to be set loose? Can they still be around now and are they being added to?

Getting your hands (while you still have them) on a predatory cat would be difficult these days. Characters like the Tiger King may well exist in America but what chance is there that you could find a tightly regulated wildlife park in the U.K. willing to sell you a cub? Pretty slim, if not impossible in these days when any pregnancy or birth of an endangered animal is greeted with fanfare and a press release. The shady “Puma Pete” of old isn’t going to be able to slip one in his trench coat and knock on your back door in the middle of the night.We don’t border any jungle habitat in the U.K. so no quick nip over the border and you would need deep pockets to look after one. Who would even own one? You are perhaps looking at the unwise nouveau riche,

an internet influencer now swimming in cash, bedecked in bling with a point to prove or perhaps more likely a foreign oligarch or dubious royal family member with a cavernous diplomatic bag available to them and a big cat attitude. There probably isn't a shortage of them. Once in your possession, homing a big cat in your expansive country estate is not going to be a problem. I lived on a smallholding in Sussex for five years and in that time nobody visited that I did not invite. No footpath passed my door on a country lane and I often mused I could be up to anything and nobody would ever know. An Englishman's home can truly be his castle and privacy is easily possible in this country especially if you have pockets far deeper than mine.

A number of years ago I had the pleasure of speaking to the experienced keepers of lions and tigers at Paradise Wildlife Park in Hertfordshire. They offer a big cat feeding experience and after watching the keepers walk around the enclosure, actually with the animals, I asked as to their safety and the wisdom in doing this?

If reared from a young age, apparently, it is pretty safe but there is a period of danger. When a big cat hits the teenage years the keepers stay out. As a parent this sounded familiar. A flexing of muscle and claws commences and you don't want to be wrestled by a 250kg big cat in a temper tantrum. I am guessing that it is at this point that an unscrupulous private owner may decide to glance the other way as they leave the door ajar to the cage. Are we therefore encountering unruly teenagers in our landscape? In fact Felicity and the timings between the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 and her capture in 1980 fit this timeframe rather well.

The average life expectancy of a Puma in the wild is 12 years; in captivity they can hit 20 years but if they are living rough, life won't be easy, so maybe a wild puma could expect to live for somewhere in between. To maintain that population you are going to need breeding pairs, although that is a slim chance, the possibility is still there. Just maybe they are being added to by occasional escapees wearing diamond studded collars?

I spend a lot of time walking and when out alone in a bleak landscape you start to entertain fantasies of encountering wild beasts. Well at least I do. In fact I met a Rottweiler in the throes of rabies up a mountain in Spain some years back! I was on my own and luckily a large branch was to hand, discretion being the better part of valour as I cautiously retired but I wouldn't recommend the experience. Apart from that encounter, large wild beasts were absent from my life until.....

Every year I receive an invite from an old friend Alan, to join a group of not so good golfers and yet excellent drinkers for a weekend of mayhem. Last time it was off to the environs of Ipswich, Rendlesham, the Suffolk Coast and Heaths nearby with the Broads to the north.

Alan and I normally share a golf buggy, suitably loaded with snacks and beer for our adventure. The first of these rounds took place on a beautiful sunny September day. Having putted out the green about halfway around the course we returned to the buggy. I noted my score with dismay before leaping into the driving seat of the buggy where I waited for Alan to complete his usual interminable fiddling.

I glanced up the course to the next tee. Directly behind that was a fairway and just beyond it, another tee. The far tee was bordered by conifers to the rear and behind those a large grassy bank rose up and to the right. Laying in the middle of the grass bank was a jet black panther! I sat staring at it without moving. The large cat appeared to be asleep, stretched out and basking in the sun.

After what felt like an epoch Alan eventually finished his fiddling, glanced towards me, saw what I was looking at and then whispered to me in hushed tones "My god, do you see that?".

"Uhuh." I responded: "I reckon we drive straight at it, at full speed!" He agreed "Yeah go!"

And so, fuelled by enthusiasm and probably too many cans of beer, I put my foot to the floor and shot in a straight line directly at the puma. The path ahead was treacherous, the golf cart jumped and slid over obstacles, sending items crashing about and the clubs clattering in the rear. I'd be damned if the beast would scarper behind the conifers before we got close enough to get a good look at it and a photo. "Get your phone out I cried!" Alan scrambled for his phone as he bounced around the golf cart and the puma drew ever closer. We sped on, crossing the first tee, then across the fairway towards the far tee and our prize. Something began to dawn on me. The majestic conifers to the rear border of the distant tee were not so large as I thought and indeed were more of a miniature variety. The cart speed began to lesson as did our joint excitement as we approached the beast. Slowly and with great panache, the large black domestic cat arose from its' slumber, stood up, yawned and sauntered away. Utterly fooled by the landscape, a normal cat had loomed large.

In this case Alan and I had been able to pursue our prey, almost instantly and with great speed. How many others are fooled when out walking and glancing into the distance where scale cannot be verified? I suspect this could well be the explanation behind many sightings. Alan and I were amazed how we had been fooled. We still laugh about it to this day and wonder how well we could have fought off a big cat attack with a pair of putters.However sometimes explanations are not so easy and the experience or evidence more intangible. I live in East Sussex and there are many walking opportunities over the South Downs populated by plenty of sheep. Plenty of juicy food for a predatory cat, if you may indulge me? Nearby to me is Mount Caburn. At 490ft it is a prominent landmark about a mile east of Lewes offering great views over the South Downs and a fair degree of isolation with many dips in the landscape. My friend Gary would walk his German Shepherd there quite often. On one such walk he was on his way back down, following an invigorating climb he was making his way to his car parked nearby.

On passing an area of overgrowth he heard the slow crunching and breaking of twigs nearby of something stealthily moving through the brush unseen. He stopped to listen. It felt like he was being stalked.

There was a loud crunch which sounded, to Gary's alerted imagination, as if a large creature had landed in the undergrowth some distance behind him, as if leaping from higher to lower ground.

Now all he could hear was silence! He looked at his dog and it immediately bolted into the distance and towards his parked car. He looked around and behind him, the daylight failing towards dusk and after very careful consideration, he also sprinted for his car.

He didn't look back and when he reached the car his dog was sitting there patiently. In a flash he opened the door and dog and man leapt in and he slammed the door shut. Only then did he risk a look back up the path, now in twilight. There was nothing there, at least nothing he could see and he waited around a while but to no avail. The mystery of the stalking sounds remained just that.

What would spook a large and protective German Shepherd and a man not prone to flight? Gary had walked there many times before. There are a few possibilities, "a predatory sheep" as Gary joked to me but just perhaps..... maybe what he encountered was an unruly teenager looking for a spot of supper. I still walk and my search goes on.

I still walk and my search goes on.

Notes & Queries

A Bi-pedal Fox

Daily Telegraph January 2023

Thanks to Richard George

A Derbyshire couple have spoken of their shock after seeing a fox that was missing its hind legs walking on its front paws "like someone doing a handstand." Experts said the animal is likely to have been disabled from birth and provided food by concerned residents. Phil and Jane Carter, who live in Ilkston, Derbyshire, said they spotted the fox and filmed it before it dashed off "like a rocket"…" It was fascinating," Mr Carter,71,added. " It stood bolt upright and ran like a human being on two legs. It just had two little hairy stumps at the back…"

An axolotl in a Washington state lake?

According to the Northwest Enterprise (Anacortes, Washington) of June 6th, 1885 there was an axolotl-type "reptile" in Medical Lake in the state.

A Monster Butterfly

The Star (Reynoldsville,Pennsylvania) of December 28th,1904 reported the following: " **A Monster Butterfly –** Early in October Mrs

W.T.Cox while in the grape arbor noticed a very large cocoon. Her curiosity being aroused she cut the twig off to which it was attached and hung it up in the dining room , near a gas jet. On Sunday morning ,December 18th it sent forth a monster butterfly of great beauty in colors. It measured five inches from tip to tip of its wings. It is still alive and doing well at this writing."

The largest butterfly in the United States is the Giant Swallow-tail, with a wing span of between 4.6 and 7.4 inches, so this butterfly of 1904 may have been this species.

Alligator found in New York City Pond

From Loren Coleman via Bob Skinner

4-Foot Alligator Found Cruising Pond in New York City Park

A 4-foot long alligator was found in Brooklyn's Prospect Park Lake Sunday morning, weak and far from its typical habitat, in an area popular with kids and other visitors. Park workers removed the huge alligator around 8:30 a.m. and transported it to a local animal care hospital, Joseph Puleo, vice president of District Council 27, told the New York Post. Meghan Lalor, a rep for the Parks Department, said the reptile is native to warm, tropical climates and was "lethargic and possibly cold-shocked" from the New York waters. Lalor told the Post the creature was probably an abandoned pet whose owner thought to release it in public waters, although she warned it's dangerous to release an animal into a new environment. "Thankfully, no one was harmed, and the animal is being evaluated," Lalor said. Visitors to the park ranged from amazed to horrified at the sight of the dog-sized alligator, with one shocked dad telling the Post "that's pretty terrifying since this part is a pretty kids-dominated section of the park." Another visitor, who went by the name Moses, expressed remorse for the creature.

You'd never expect to see something like that here. But man, I feel bad for it," Moses said. "It shouldn't be in a lake. Animals are like people, you know?"

The above appeared on Loren Coleman`s Facebook page on **February 19th 2023.**

Exceptionally slow post

Crystal Palace letter arrives more than 100 years late

Bbc.co.uk February 17th 2023

A letter written in February 1916 has arrived at a flat in south London more than 100 years later.

The envelope, which has a Bath postmark and a 1d (1p) stamp bearing George V's head, arrived at Finlay Glen's flat on Hamlet Road, Crystal Palace, in 2021.He said: "We were obviously pretty surprised and mystified as to how it could have been sat around for more than 100 years." Royal Mail said it remained "uncertain what happened in this instance". The letter was sent two years before World War One rationing was introduced and King George V had been on the throne for five years. Future prime ministers Harold Wilson and Sir Edward Heath were both born later that year…

Alligator in New Zealand?

Colonies and India

December 10th 1886

"An extraordinary story was current in Auckland respecting the presence in the Waikato River of a reptile described by two lads chased by it as resembling an alligator but by one of the masters of the Grammar

School as something like a sea serpent. The Auckland Herald thinks the reptile an Alligator, the natives allege it to be the taniwha, and many others look upon it as only a very large eel or perhaps "very like a whale" . The two lads who first reported it declare that it chased them on the land, rushing after them with open mouth."

Serpent with four eyes in W.Yorkshire

Todmorden Advertiser and Hebden Bridge Newsletter

August 23rd 1895

On Saturday morning, Mr James Sunderland shot a strange reptile, said to be a kind of serpent. It is said to be two feet in length, and to have four eyes. The animal was shot in Acre-lane, Midgley.

Monster frog in Massachusetts

East Oregonian October 27th 1911

Giant frog bites man

Ware, Mass. William H. Dearden, secretary to Congressman F.H. Gillett, who, with John Mabbett, Congressman G.P. Lawrence`s secretary, is camping in Hardwick, was attacked by a monster frog while dressing fish at the edge of the lake. Dearden shows a series of incisions on his right hand where the frog bit him. He killed the frog which he says was so old that the cartilage of its mouth had turned into bone and provided it with serrated jaws as hard as flint. The frogs legs were fourteen inches long.

Mystery ball on Japanese coast

www.unilad.com

February 22nd 2023

Thanks to Bob Skinner

“There is a big mysterious metal ball on a beach in Japan and officials are investigating it in the hopes of figuring out where this thing came from and what it is.

Alright, so we do pretty much know what it is, it's a rusty metal ball about 1.5 metres in diameter which appears to have washed up on the beach.

What people are still trying to figure out is what this strange ball is meant to be for, it's got handle-like additions so it looks like it could be attached to something and the big question is what that something might have been.

The ball was found on Enshu Beach in Tsuboi-cho, Nishi-ku, Hamamatsu City at around 9am local time on 21 February…”

New species of spider in Australia

I paper March 21st 2023

Rare spider species found in Australia

A new "rare and giant" species of trapdoor spider which lives in Queensland, central Australia, has been identified by researchers. The nocturnal species is found only in the Brigalow Belt area, west of Bundaberg. The arachnologist Michael Rix told Australia`s ABC the females are up to five centimetres in body length and are the larger of the species. " They`ve got these really cryptic trapdoors in these woodland habitats on the ground and most people wouldn`t even realise that they`re there," he said. The spider was discovered by a team from Queensland Museum and the species is thought to be endangered…"

Beavers in London

I paper March 21st 2023

Beavers heading to west London

" Beavers are to be reintroduced to west London after 400 years to help tackle climate change. The London Mayor, Sadiq Khan, has announced plans to transform Paradise Fields in Greenford into a wetland for the animals. Last year, wildlife experts introduced two beavers, nicknamed Justin and Sigourney Beaver, to Forty Hall Farm in Enfield, north London, but the male beaver died before the pair could breed…"

Did the Irish discover North America before Columbus?

Treasure October 1983, Volume 14, number 10

Irish beat Columbus by 800 years? Charleston, W.Va—Rock carvings

found in West Virginia may have been done by Irish missionaries more than 800 years before Christopher Columbus arrived in America, archaeologists say. Scientists examining the carvings—at first believed to be the work of Indians found they were written in an ancient Irish alphabet called *Ogam* and contain messages of a Christian nature. The study, published in the March issue of *Wonderful West Virginia* , was conducted by ancient language expert Barry Fell, a professor emeritus at Harvard University; Robert L.Pyle, an archaeologist for the federal government in Morgantown; and Ida Jane Gallagher, an ancient history researcher and freelance writer.

Fell said the writings, found in Wyoming and Boone Counties, date back to the sixth and eighth centuries and are the longest Ogam inscriptions ever discovered. Similar carvings have been found in Ireland. Irish monastic records indicate an ecclesiastic now known as St. Brendan made two voyages across the Atlantic in the late sixth century and discovered a land far to the west., Fell said.

The carvings on the rock-face near Horse Creek in Boone County were translated by Fell to read, in part: " A happy season is Christmas, a time of joy and goodwill to all people. " THE EVENING BULLETIN.

A flying snake in South Africa

The Ottawa Journal March 4th 1936

Flying Serpent Johannesburg Star

"An unusual story was related to the police of Ladysmith recently when natives made a report that they had seen a big snake flying through the air. The natives, who live in the Drakensberg area, said they had seen a huge serpent flying along rapidly, its long tail wriggling behind it. They said it was black and white in color, and made a hissing noise. They were emphatic that it was a snake. The police are inclined to believe that the " flying serpent" is nothing else but a mist phenomenon. Cases have been known ,it is said, of a small belt of

mist being caught up in a swirling wind. This action has the effect of creating an optical illusion. Swirling at terrific speed, the mist writhes and contorts just like a serpent. One native added that, to make matters worse, a big airplane nearly hit the ground just after the serpent had passed on. He was sure the serpent was leading the plane to disaster. It was explained to him that when the Berg is heavily clouded airplanes have to drop to a low altitude to get their bearings."

Giant Japanese frog

A Giant Frog

Evening Gazette (Aberdeen) October 1st 1892

Japan has discovered a giant frog. A native journal vouches for the fact that Mr Miyoshi, while conducting geographical investigations, fell in with a bull frog squatted on the ground, which appeared to be about five feet high. He fled to the village, and returned with thirty villagers, who also saw the creature. While watching it from a safe distance the bull frog breathed and instantly the valley was filled with a fog so dense that the men were prevented from seeing each other. When it cleared away, the bullfrog had vanished.

Dog-fox hybrid part one

CFZ blog May 4th 2023

In mid April 2023 I went to the Local and Family History Library in Leeds where they have a complete set of Country Life magazine from 1900 up to at least the 1980s. It has proved to be an excellent resource for Fortean Zoology. In the issue of May 3rd 1902 I found a letter with a photograph of an alleged fox-dog hybrid. I also found a second dog-fox hybrid story in the issue of May 17th 1902. I present the photo in this blog. The letter is too long to reproduce in its entirety here, I just present the main details: "

HYBRID DOG-FOX. Sir, I enclose herewith a photograph of a hybrid dog and fox that has been for some time in my possession. As to the question of her being a cross and hybrid there can be no dispute. She was bred close to my brother-in-law`s farm, whose address I enclose and who will confirm all I state. The fox was often seen to visit the collie bitch, and when young the pup could hardly be told from a true fox; she has grown fatter and heavier since, and even now I am constantly asked by strangers as to what breed she is, and if she is not partly fox…I believe she can see as well at night as a cat; has a splendid nose for rats or rabbits; she is also very sly and crafty in her ways at times; colour nearly the same as a fox, but not so much white…"

Dog-fox hybrid Part Two

CFZ blog May 4th 2023

Here is the second story of a dog-fox hybrid that I came across whilst at Leeds Local History Library in mid April 2023.Its from Country Life May 17th 1902,as follows: " HYBRID DOG-FOX. Sir-The interesting photograph of the hybrid dog-fox in last weeks COUNTRY LIFE made me look up in my collection of sporting prints a similar picture, which was published in one of the sporting magazines of the day some seventy-eight years back .It is called a "Portrait of a Cross of the Dog and Fox, in the possession of Lord Cranley..."

A huge bat in the Galapagos Islands

According to the Bismarck Tribune (North Dakota) of July 30th 1929 the Gifford Pinchot expedition to the Galapagos Islands discovered a giant black bat with a wing-span of 15 feet. The only cryptid I could think of associated with this would be the Ropen, but this has only been reported from Papua New Guinea which is thousands of miles away. Gifford Pinchot was an American forestry expert and a Republican politician. Apparently many birds were collected.

A black puma in Guatemala

CFZ blog

have been reading the new issue of Animals and Men, issue number 72,(available on Amazon), specifically the article on sightings of black pumas in Illinois and Indiana and this prompted me to see if I could find any other reports of black pumas in the United States. So I searched on Chronicling America, the online newspaper archive and although I didn`t find any other reports of black pumas in the United States, I did find, in The Chapel Hill Weekly, a North Carolina newspaper of December 20th 1946, a story about the sighting of a black puma in Guatemala, a country where both jaguars and ordinarily coloured (i.e. tan brown, see image) pumas are found.

Black-veined white butterfly returns to England

Butterfly loved by Churchill back in England after almost 100 years

The Guardian online June 5th 2023

"When they last roamed England in 1925, they counted Winston Churchill as a fan. Now, black-veined whites – an extremely rare species of British butterfly – have been spotted fluttering once again.

Small numbers of the black and white insects have been spotted in fields and hedgerows in south-east London, nearly a century after the species was thought to have become extinct in the UK.

Naturalists are wondering whether the recent spate of warm weather may account for their reappearance.

First classified as a British species during King Charles II's reign, the butterflies are believed to have died out in the UK after a series of wet and chilly autumns in the 1920s – although they continued to thrive in warmer climates in Europe and north Africa…"

Photo: Black-veined white on the red clover. Wikipedia

Exmouth: Early bird-man experiment?

Nigel Wright

Nigel sent me this account in late February 2023:

NOTES: I simply loved hearing about this newspaper account from Maurice Wickstead. “On the 28th May 1845, on Exmouth sea wall, a man was seen at daybreak in curious apparel and with a series of flapping motions took off over the estuary and landed safely at Dawlish Warren, thereafter never to be seen again!” I have picked on this to amply demonstrate the often hopeless reliability of eye-witness accounts much beloved by our legal system for example. I’m thinking in this case possibly a late-night reveller somewhat the worse for wear, spotted and disturbed an unusual but big bird, possibly something like an Albatross blown way off course by Atlantic gales? I think and certainly hope I’m correct in thinking that it has been proved, way beyond any reasonable doubt, that it is impossible for a man to lift his body weight into the air using wings attached to his arms?

Mystery cat near Macclesfield Cheshire

Communication from Laura Hughes 26-2-23

Hi Richard Just seen your post so obviously private messages as I don’t want to be laughed at. About 7 years ago I went to the Bollington tip on Albert Road, I saw what look like a puma ? it was brown/ tan and huge with massive muscles on its back legs the tail was really long and nearly to the ground but curled up at the back. I tried to take a pic but it was bright sunshine and I had got a new phone that week so couldn’t take it. I had to look and look again to check I was actually seeing it, and I watched it walk all across the field until it went behind some trees We called the police and I went down with him to the area I had seen it. But of course it was gone. At that time in Bollington this was fields and used for sheep, and near a stream. did. I was even reluctant to tell my other half as I thought he would laugh at me, but no he was really supportive as he knows me after 36 years 😊 I know

what I saw.

To me it was exactly the same as this but more brown/tan in colour. I must also admit I was quite scared at the time as well. Or cougar I've no idea just know I saw it.

E-mail from Richard George February 6th 2023

Here's a quote that might interest you. It's from a book I own called *The Braughing of Victor Tott: The Visual and Written Memories of a Country Gentleman* (2010). Braughing is right at the heart of the "Hertfordshire's Devon" countryside I mentioned in an article in FS a little while back. It was an important local Roman settlement... over to Victor Tott...

"Braughing was an important place at that time, and many items of interest have been brought to the surface when the soil has been moved... An urn was unearthed on Wymond Ley some years back, but I did not see it, it was said to be in perfect shape, there was something moving inside and this caused great interest as to what this might be... (p.86).

These urns are usually funerary (I was on a dig excavating these in St. Albans about forty years ago). What moving creature could have been contained ? A giant earthworm ? An entombed toad ? Or something more eldritch connected to dead Romans ?

All best

Richard

Letters to Fate

Thanks to Gary Mangiacopra (c. 1950-2022)

July 1955, Volume 8,Number 7, Issue 64

Out of the Concrete

In Roanoke, Virginia, John J. Kealey tore up a concrete strip which had been in place for 20 years. Two frogs jumped out. Kealy said he could not understand how they got air, food or water.

March 1959, Volume 12, Number 3, Issue 108

Where did the fish come from?

We`ve been pretty long-haired in our column thus far and it`s time to brighten it up with a little ichthyology—a subject we haven`t discussed for several months. Icthyology is the biological study of fish. And over in Australia they`ve got a poser. They`ve built a dam near Mary Kathleen, Australia, which is nearly 300 miles from the sea. It will eventually impound 3 1/2 billion gallons of water to serve the town and the new uranium-ore processing plant that began operating on October 27, 1958.

The only water course leading into the reservoir known as Lake Corella, is completely dry. And yet such huge numbers of fish have appeared in the growing reservoir, and have multiplied so rapidly that they threaten to block the " reticulation system" in the dam. (The dictionary says " reticulation" means " netlike.")

Fortunately, enormous numbers of cormorants have suddenly appeared in the desert and are gobbling down the fish in tons. But that still leaves unsettled the problem of where the fish came from.

March 1959, Volume 12, Number 3, Issue 108

The Phantom Cyclist

A ghostly cyclist who appears to haunt a certain spot along a road called the Kingsway recently was reported in the Dundee, Scotland, edition of the People`s Journal. In the late fall of 1956 Edward Meakin, director of a Dundee firm called the Forfar Company, was driving east to Dundee along the Kingsway after taking his sister-in-law ,Sheila Roger, to her home in Invergowrie. It was shortly after 11: 00 pm and it was raining. As Meakin peered into the path of his headlights he saw what appeared to be an old man on a bicycle cross the road and disappear into a side road.

Several days later Meakin passed the spot in daylight and was surprised to note that there was no side road where he had seen the cyclist. The road at that point was hemmed in on both sides by quite high grassy green banks.

One night some 18 months later Meakin was driving his sister-in-law to his home in Dundee where she was to stay with his wife. Again he saw what appeared to be an old man on a bicycle cross the road approximately 100 feet ahead of the car. Miss Roger saw the figure also and asked where it had gone.

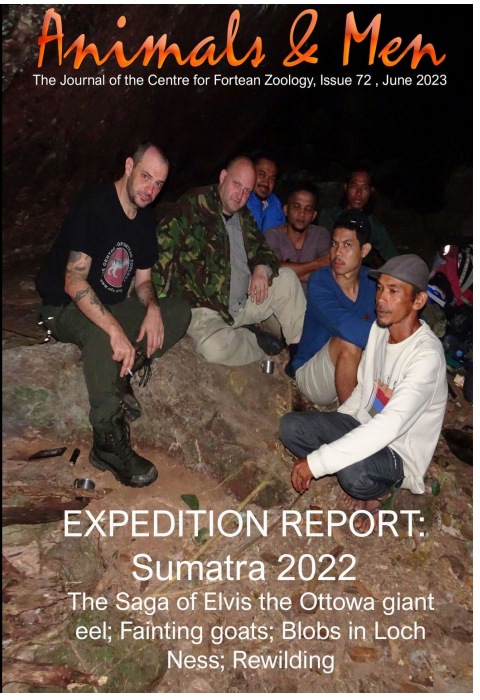
Meakin said he was certain that the figure was the same one he had seen on the previous occasion. He added that the sighting had occurred at the same spot along the Kingsway and at the same time-shortly after 11:00pm. The figure, he said, seemed to float across the road in a bent position as if hunched over bicycle handlebars. According to Miss Roger, the figure wore a cap and the bicycle wheels looked like circles of smoke.

April 1959, Volume 14, Number 4, Issue 109
It`s still raining frogs

Thousands of tiny live frogs fell from the sky during a freak shower at St. Julian Sur Suran, France, on August 8, 1958, according to a Reuters news dispatch. Residents of this village in the Jura Mountains said the frogs were mixed with hail stones.

April 1959, Volume 12, Number 4, Issue 109,
The steamboat that vanished

One of the most baffling mysteries of the Mississippi is the fate of the steamboat Mississippi Queen. On April 17, 1873, the Mississippi Queen left Memphis, Tennessee, on her usual run to New Orleans, Louisiana. Considered the finest boat on the river, she was a majestic sight as she cruised along, her tall smokestacks belching and her paddles churning the water. She was seen and admired by persons on shore practically everywhere along her route. The skies were clear and the river was placid. Bright spring sunlight bathed the decks of the Mississippi Queen by day and at night she moved through a flood of silver moonlight, her lights blazing. With the music of her orchestra trailing behind her, she was a scene of carefree gaiety. On the day she was due to arrive in New Orleans, the Mississippi Queen failed to appear. As the hours passed, shipping officials grew increasingly concerned. The vessel never had been so late before. Finally a search was organized. The Mississippi Queen was traced to a point on the river from which she was last seen and from here on the shallow river was dragged and searched the banks on each side. It was considered impossible for a vessel the size of the steamboat to disappear on a populated river...But although the search was continued for weeks, no trace of the Mississippi Queen ever was found."


Animals & Men
The Journal of the Centre for Fortean Zoology, Issue 72 , June 2023
EXPEDITION REPORT:
Sumatra 2022
The Saga of Elvis the Ottowa giant eel; Fainting goats; Blobs in Loch Ness; Rewilding

Available from early June from the Centre for Fortean Zoology UK or Amazon